

Humph
Eng. Hist.

THE
FORMATION OF A NATION.

A LECTURE

BY THE

HON. JOHN XAVIER MERRIMAN, M.L.A.,

*Delivered under the
Auspices of the Scottish Church Literary and Musical Society,*

AT THE

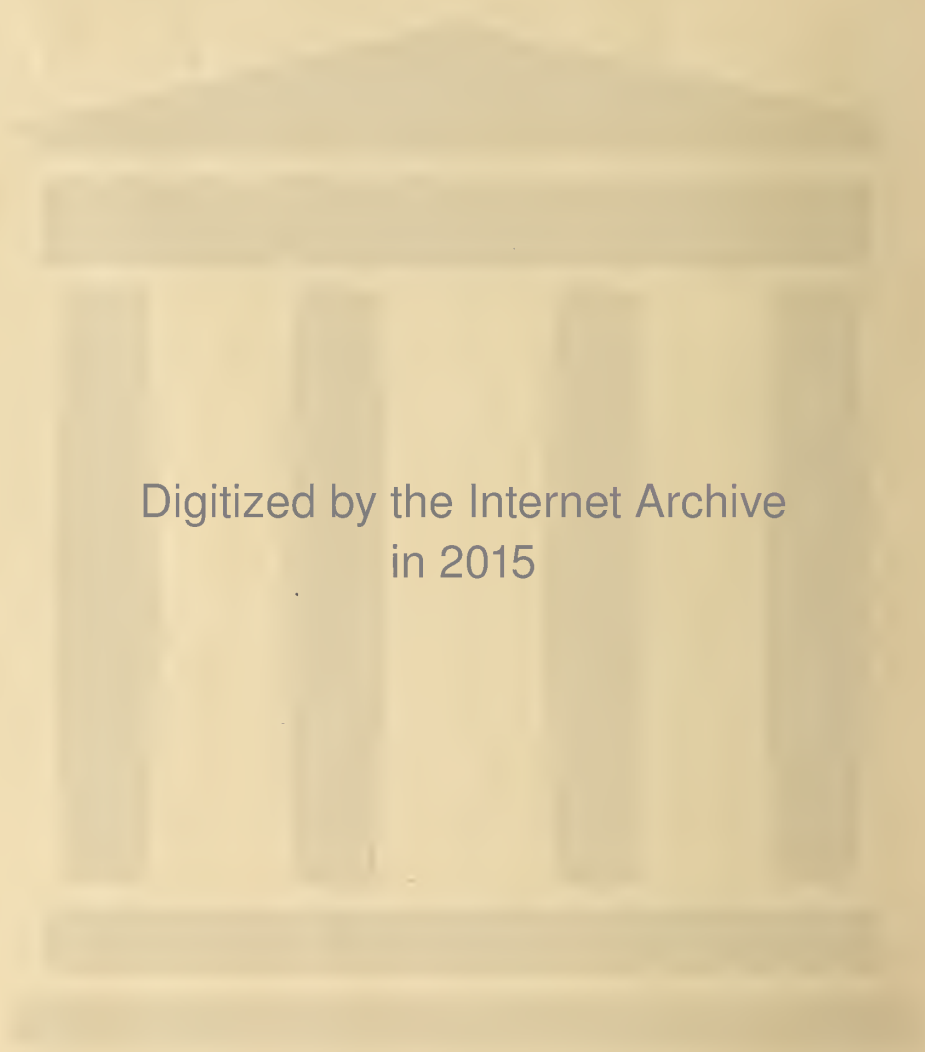
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THE Formation of a Nation.



IN the Mutual Hall, on Friday, April 22, the Hon. J. X. Merriman, M.L.A., delivered a lecture on the above subject, in connection with the Scottish Church Literary Society. The Hall was crowded. Mr. W. E. Moore (Mayor of Woodstock) occupied the chair, and amongst other gentlemen on the platform were Mr. R. M. Ross, the Rev. J. M. Russell, Captain J. Hewat, Dr. Douglass, Dr. Baird, Messrs. Cairncross, Rawbone and McLachlan.

The Chairman said :—Ladies and Gentlemen—Mr. Merriman, who has so kindly consented to lecture to you this evening, is so well known that he needs no introduction. I will now call on him to deliver the lecture he has so kindly undertaken to give.

Mr. Merriman, who was received with applause, said :—

Mr. Chairman,—When I was asked some weeks ago to give a lecture to your Society, and when I accepted the honour which that invitation conferred upon me, I fear that I greatly over-estimated my own power of saying anything of sufficient value to interest and detain a literary audience; but I hope that I did not at the same time over-estimate the indulgence which I feel sure that I shall receive at your hands this evening. The subject upon which I shall venture to offer some remarks is indeed one of surpassing importance, and deserving of far abler treatment than I can give it. To every one in this room and in this colony, to every one who lives under the flag of Great Britain, and I might even go further, and say that to a vast proportion of the world's inhabitants, the future destiny of the magnificent Empire now under the sway of Queen Victoria is the one political problem which will in the very near future have the most momentous effect on their well-being and their happiness.

THE GREAT COMING STRUGGLE.

The world conflict which is coming, or rather which bids fair to be renewed at no distant date, admits, as such great struggles generally have done, of a personal illustration. Depend upon it, the hostility of Prince Bismarck to Mr. Gladstone, which makes itself felt just now in so many humiliating ways, is not a mere personal squabble. It is certainly not founded on any race antipathy or national difference between the German and British peoples, linked as they are by a thousand ties of community of thought and feeling. The one man represents in its most brilliant form Government by force—autocratic Government—and the other is the example, perhaps not in its most successful or admirable personal development, of Government by the people. I think that it is every day becoming more plain that in some form or another the contest between autocracy, or Government by force, and Parliamentary Government, of which England is the

foremost representative, is destined, at no distant date, to be renewed; and on the prosperity or the downfall of the power of Great Britain will the issue as regards Europe in no small measure be decided. I speak now of principles, not of men. Do not think that I am insensible to the manifold virtues of Prince Bismarck or to the material advantages of his rule, or that I ignore the unfortunate defects of Mr. Gladstone, and the mistakes and misfortunes of the British Government. In the noble and pathetic words of the poet, I would say to the critics of our nation :—

“I chide with thee not, that thy sharp
Upbraidings, often assailed
England my country—for we
Heavy and sad, for her sons
Long since, deep in our hearts
Echo the blame of her foes.
We, too, sigh that she flags;
We, too, say that she now—
Scarce comprehending the voice
Of her greatest golden-mouthed sons
Of a former age any more—
Stupidly travels the round
Of mechanic business, and lets
Slow die out of her life
Glory and genius and joy.
So thou arraignest her, her foe,
So we arraign her, her sons.

Yes, we arraign her! but she,
The weary Titan, with deaf
Ears and labour-dimmed eyes,
Regarding neither to right
Nor left, goes passively by,
Staggering on to her goal;
Bearing on shoulders immense,
Atlantian, the load,
Well-nigh not to be borne,
Of the too vast orb of her fate.”

HOW THE QUESTION AFFECTS US.

Yes! England, it is true, staggers, as before now she has staggered, and seemed about to fall in the world's race; but, thanks to the indomitable spirit of her sons, animated by “Freedom's generous flame,” she has even risen superior to her fate, and will so rise as long as she remains the custodian of the principles of freedom, of justice, and of right. It is in the principles involved, and in their maintenance, and not for the mere vulgar lust of conquest, nor the admiration of bigness, “spread-eagleism” as it is called; nor yet for the material prosperity of a huge and ever-increasing trade, that the importance of the British Empire lies with regard to the rest of mankind, and the continuance of our nation becomes a problem which concerns the world as much almost as it does the individual citizens of the Empire. Here in South Africa, this question of the growth, the progress, and the continuance of the British Empire ought to be, perhaps, more familiar to us than to the dwellers in almost any other part of Her Majesty's dominions. Here we are often told that

we must look to forming a nation of our own; and indeed, I am not sure that the boast is not made that we, or, at any rate some among us, do already claim to form a separate nation. I think that I can enter into and sympathise with some of the feelings of those who put forward this view; and I will try to allude to them by-and-bye, but I would take leave to remind them that something more than an exclusive dialect or a piece of coloured bunting is required to form a nation in its truest and its best sense. But within the wide bounds of that mighty empire to which we belong we believe that we have those principles of freedom and of good government which have ere now shed a lustre on some of the smallest nations of the earth, and I venture to think that we shall do wisely to seek for a continuance of the advantages which we have by maintaining and developing the national life of which we now form a part, rather than by a premature attempt to establish a weak individuality which will infallibly result in a contraction and a lessening of all those qualities which go to make a nation alone deserving of respect.

WHAT IS A NATION?

But the very enunciation of this conviction places me face to face with a difficulty in defining the meaning of the expression "nation;" and in the attempt to do so I find no hard and fast rules to guide me. In one sense the term nation means all those and those only which spring from one common stock. For instance, we speak of the Hellenic, the Jewish, and the German nations, though perhaps we ought more properly to apply to them the term "race" or "people"; and in two of these, both very notable examples of a nation in one sense of the word—I mean the Hellenic and the German—a common nationality did not, or does not, by any means convey the idea of common government or institutions; while in the case of the Jews the nation unmistakably exists while it has no separate institutions at all. On the other hand, the Roman Empire, in its later development, the French, the Italians, and the British afford examples of nations, which include peoples drawn from many sources, speaking, in some instances, different languages, but yet moulded by common institutions and by common ideas into a corporate existence, and, if I may use the expression, a separate individuality more lasting and more coherent even than the bond of common speech. The British Empire is, as I have said, a nation in this latter sense. Its citizens are of many races, many colours, many tongues, and it is not possible for them to feel that devoted affection which an Athenian, for instance, felt for Athens, or a Roman of the republic for Rome, nor yet that touching love for England which finds expression in the almost passionate enthusiasm which Shakespeare puts into the mouth of "time-honoured Lancaster," when he speaks of—

"This royal throne of kings, this sceptred isle,
This earth of majesty, this seat of Mars,
This other Eden, demi-paradise,
This fortress built by nature for herself
Against infections and the hand of war,
This happy breed of men, this little world—
This precious stone set in the silver sea,
Which serves it in the office of a wall,
Or as a moat defensive to a house
Against the envy of less happier lands;
This blessed plot, this earth, this realm, this England,
This land of such dear souls, this dear, dear land,
Dear for her reputation through the world."

THE COLONIAL TYPE OF LOYALTY.

Such words would be an unreal mockery in the mouth of a Dutch Afrikaner or of a French Canadian, and they would be but strained and forced even to born colonists of English extraction. The loyalty of these, though no less fervent, is of another kind. It is more like that feeling of re-

spect for the Majesty of law and order which we can imagine a Roman citizen under the Antonines feeling for the wonderful fabric of the Roman Empire, for the reign of law and duty, and to which, in our own case, is superadded the affection which we feel for those free institutions which we owe to our common head. We lose the poetic and the emotional attachment which knits the members of a small community together; we must see to it that we gain the broader and more rational respect for that order and freedom which is the happy lot of the citizens of the freest nation in the world. Ill fortune, indeed, if we have neither—if, as some had their way, we were to belong to some ill-contrived republic, like those which in South America have so often brought disgrace on the name of free institutions, melancholy examples, deserving neither affection nor respect.

LARGE AND SMALL STATES.

Connected with this, which may be called the individual aspect of life, is the much-debated question of the relative merit of large or small States, and it is in considering these that we must make full allowance for those feelings which I think underlie the vague wishes of those to whom I alluded above, who would fain pursue a policy of separation rather than of union. To many people the external attributes of power and of majesty which only belong to great empires and to vast dominions are in themselves attractive, and the current of modern ideas seems to set in this direction. You may perhaps recollect than an eloquent exponent of these doctrines once visited our shores, and laid down the dogma that the day of small States was at an end. I think that this was a most unworthy concession to the materialistic tendencies of the age; and I confess that to me it seems that in nations, as in individuals, true greatness and true prosperity have not depended, and never will depend on material wealth or importance. It is well that we should sometimes, in this day of big things, remind ourselves that Athens is but an insignificant place on the world's surface; but that she has been truly called the "mother of right, and liberty, of art, and of wisdom;" that Holland and Switzerland are the smallest among the nations of Europe, but that the thoughts and ideas which they first inculcated, in the hands of England and the United States, have changed, and are destined to change the fortunes of mankind, and if by some political cataclysm they are ever swept out of existence, their teaching and their example will never die; while, on the other hand, if the two mightiest Empires of modern Europe—Germany and Russia—were destroyed to-morrow, they would leave a far less lasting impression on the history of mankind than the single city of Athens, or the tiny democracies created in the Alps. It is, however, when great ideas and noble thoughts are happily combined with power, and with material importance, that their influence is felt for good. The love of law, and the sense of civic order and of public duty, when backed up by the might of the Roman legions, acquired a life and vigour which to this day controls and shapes the forces of civilisation; and the doctrine of the right of the people to manage their own affairs, taught with many hard knocks in the little communities of Switzerland, and won, after eighty years of incredible suffering by the handful of people in Holland, has become, when handed on to England and the United States, the mightiest engine of human welfare; but we should never forget, we who enter into their labours, what a debt we owe to those small States, which it is rather the fashion of the day to disparage and ignore.

THE VALUE OF THE EMPIRE.

The surpassing value of the British Empire to humanity and to the world at large consists in the fact, that not only does it profess the doctrines of freedom, of law and of

justice, but it has also the material strength and power to maintain its rights, and to spread over the world an ideal of government which is certainly the best and purest which has yet been seen ; and the problem which faces each citizen of that Empire is whether it is possible so to keep together the wonderful fabric as to continue its noble and beneficent work, or whether the task is so hopeless that a more or less speedy dissolution of the natural bond must take place, and England, with all its glorious past, and with all its noble record, sink back into the category of those small States whose existence is but the memory of departed greatness. Some aspects of this problem, which concern us all so nearly, I wish to place before you this evening ; though my remarks will be intended rather to offer suggestions which may form hints for future consideration than to attempt the impossible task of dogmatising on a question which is perhaps one of the weightiest which has ever called for solution at the hands of the statesmen of any age.

CAN WE GO BACK ?

Here in a colony it is perhaps needless to discuss the opinions of those who, in the mother country, argue with some force and show of reason against the continuance of the Empire at all. The opinions they hold are not wholly selfish, nay, in theory at least, they must find an echo in many thoughtful minds. To us indeed, viewing, as we do, the shield from the other side, the conditions of life are so entirely dissimilar, that we scarcely give weight enough to such considerations ; nor are we likely to admit that a continuance and development of the system to which we owe our existence is incompatible with a higher form of civilisation, and that in fact, instead of promoting, it is calculated absolutely to retard the true welfare of our race. But it is well to hear both sides of the question, and I will take leave to quote what I think you will allow to be a fair exposition of this side of the case. "The England of Shakspeare" (says my authority), "of Milton, of the idealists of the Commonwealth, is no longer good enough for an age which has mistaken bigness for greatness and material wealth for spiritual power. The imperial idea is the product of an age which has lost its faith, its insight and its calm. It is eminently sensational and eminently material. It prevents the solution of the real problems in which the people are interested by concentrating our attention on vague schemes which it is all but impossible to realise, and which, if realised, would accomplish little good. . . . Extended empire means less true culture and more mechanism ; less deep life and more shallow existence. We have no time for thought, for improvement, for these higher civilising efforts, which have never yet been exerted except in comparatively small communities—

"We who pursue
Our business with unslackening stride,
Traverse in troops with care-filled breast,
The soft Mediterranean side,
The Nile, the East,
And see all sights from pole to pole,
And glance and nod, and bustle by,
And never once possess our soul
Before we die."

A LARGER HOLLAND.

Professor Seely may well raise the question whether civilisation of this shallow, noisy, weary kind is worth propagating at all costs. We may fully recognise its many merits, but we cannot help feeling grave doubts as to its saving power. The deduction being, of course, that the sooner our Empire goes by the board the better. Now the plain answer to this is, that you cannot go back. You cannot reproduce the England of Shakspeare, of Milton, of the Commonwealth—an England, by the way, extremely unlike the cultured

ideal of these quietists—by the simple process of the disruption of her Empire. What you would produce would be a Holland on a larger scale, plus a starving proletariat, anxious, not to possess their souls, but, under the ægis of some high-sounding *ism*, to possess the property of other people. The apostles of the abandonment school, in their love for culture, lose sight of its higher aim, which is to improve not ourselves, but humanity ; and they are prepared, as the poet says—

Propter vitam visendi perdere causas.

They forget that the highest type of British character, with its sense of duty, its love of justice, and its sense of freedom, has been formed by the struggles to which we owe that Empire, which they would lightly slough off. The examples of the lives of those heroes who have toiled, have fought, have governed in every corner of the world to build up our goodly heritage, are worth a wilderness of philosophers, preach they never so wisely. The material aspects involved in a loss of empire are familiar to you all. There is no need to enlarge on the loss of power, the loss of wealth, the loss of trade, which would ensue ; but I would fain dwell on the moral side of the question, and ask you to reflect how the material character must change before the imperious Briton, with his faults and his virtues, can sink into the political lotus-eater, anxious only to be left in inglorious peace to pamper his body and to possess his soul ! To advance, or even to maintain the wonderful position which Great Britain occupies among the nations of the world, may be difficult ; nay, it may even be impossible ; but I cannot believe that any large body of her citizens in any part of the world will consent to abandon their birthright without a struggle from indifference or still less from positively designed.

THE "LET WELL ALONES."

There is another class whose conclusions tend to the same end, though their arguments are far more specious, because they appeal to that side of the national character which dreads all doctrinaire attempts to tamper with the institutions of the country, and which desires before all things to follow the sound principle of meeting and providing for each political difficulty as it arises. These are the "let well alones," an easy and pleasant, and withal a practical and influential class. They look at the problems involved in the maintenance of the Empire, and they profess to be as anxious as anyone to secure and to extend our position ; but they argue after this fashion :—Your Empire has grown without any settled plan, and it is the greatest success the world has ever seen. Why disturb what is good ? Why provide beforehand for troubles which have not arisen yet ? Why start uncomfortable theories ? Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof—at any rate, to a practical man.

THE PRACTICAL MAN.

Of course, everyone is pleased to be called a practical man ; and when the reputation is cheaply earned by sitting still and doing nothing, a great many people are likely very heartily to subscribe to the comfortable doctrine. A fair representative of this class is Lord Bury, who has been writing and speaking a good deal lately on the strength of his colonial experience. In July last, this estimable nobleman attended the first meeting of the Federation League ; he expressed his great sympathy with the movement, and he predicted success for the efforts of those who were labouring to secure a unity of the Empire, which he declared was much needed. Yet now, not a year afterwards, we find him preaching inaction, sneering at Mr. Forster, and a complete convert to the "let well alone" theory.

THE DEAD WEIGHT OF OFFICIALISM.

On this side also we have the vast influence of the official class. It is so very diffi-

cult for anyone engaged in administering a given system to be brought to believe in the necessity for reform. Change is before all things abhorrent to the true official, who under the most terrible trials clings to the doctrines of that eminent philosopher Dr. Pangloss, that "everything is for the best in the best of all possible worlds." Even now, after everything that has happened, one would not be surprised to hear that Lord Derby and his subordinates are as firmly persuaded as ever that the interests of the British Empire will be seriously imperilled if a finger is laid upon the preserves of Downing-street, or if a sacrilegious attempt is made to change the system which confers such incalculable benefits on mankind. A very brief consideration of facts will, I think, suffice to destroy this comfortable optimism; and will serve to convince anyone who devotes any thought to the matter that it is impossible that the present order of things should continue, and establish the fact that the truly practical man is he who looks ahead, and who, while acknowledging the difficulties and dangers in our path, endeavours to suggest some altered basis of our national relations which may secure for us those privileges which few among us would willingly abandon.

ANOTHER BRITAIN.

Beyond the confines of Great Britain itself and for the most part within the last fifty years, there has sprung into existence another Britain, populous, energetic, full of life and of vigour. Its citizens number more than eight million souls, their revenue is more than thirty millions sterling, and they have a national debt, fully covered by national assets, of more than one hundred and fifty millions. I am now speaking of the eight principal colonies enjoying Responsible Government, and only of citizens of European descent. The different communities which together form Britain beyond the sea are equal in resources, if not in the number of population, to many nations of Europe, and the comparison is still more favourable if we consider the nature of that population, which contains no proletariat and few of those gigantic fortunes which constitute at once the despair of political economists and one of the chief dangers of modern society. Scattered over the four quarters of the globe, they occupy some of the fairest spots on its surface, and they constitute the pride and the glory of the British nation. These eight million British citizens, free to manage their own internal affairs, are, as concerns all national relations, absolutely dependent on the Mother State, and they have no voice in those affairs, however much they might affect their present welfare or their future growth. In questions of peace and war, on which their lives, their fortunes, even their very existence might depend, their opinion is neither sought nor is it even supposed to be necessary to seek it. Canada has five million inhabitants, but a war which might place its fortunes at the mercy of a foe might be brought about by a majority in the House of Commons, largely composed of members from Ireland, which has an absolutely smaller population and infinitely fewer resources. On the other hand, it is only fair to add that up to the present the whole burden of defence of the Empire has fallen upon the British Isles, and that from this point of view the hardship and the anomaly is just as great. If we consider that the heavily-taxed population of Great Britain is called on to protect communities whose resources are at least as great as their own, and whose income is derived in no small measure from the taxation of the commodities exported from the mother country, the difficulty is great, and it is a growing one. In a few years' time it is impossible to see in what manner present relations can be maintained, or to believe that circumstances will not arise which will compel a more or less radical change. It is scarcely necessary, in the

face of this one capital fact, to speak of other aspects of the case; but it seems an unfair thing that England should discuss with France and Germany matters affecting the future of the free communities in South Africa and Australasia without their taking any part in the conference, or that Lord Derby should prose about the "comity of nations," and should decide questions which will intimately affect for weal or for woe future generations of British citizens beyond the sea, not in their interests, but in the interests of the Egyptian bondholder, or some other abstruse factor of European politics. These things are possible now; but in a few years' time they will force themselves on the attention of the statesmen of Great Britain, and the colonies will demand, at the risk of a rupture, that recognition of their relative position which a prudent statesman would be wise to anticipate.

NO MORE QUESTION OF THEORY.

I hope that I have succeeded in carrying you with me thus far; that you agree with me in revering and valuing British rule for its moral no less than its material aims; that you would view with horror any disruption of the Empire, which would stay the great work of progress and civilization, and by confining Great Britain to the British Isles set her various dependencies free to shape their independent course without the controlling influence which springs from the broad aims and wide responsibility of a united empire; and that you are prepared to allow that the march of events, and the very success of the past, forbid us to hope for the possibility for the continuance of the anomalous conditions under which the Empire now exists. It is no mere restlessness, no desire of change for the sake of change, or of action only for the sake of doing something, that has caused this question of the future relations of the component parts of the British Empire to be taken up so earnestly and so simultaneously at Home. Let no one persuade you that it is a mere matter of debating club theory. It will soon be of vital practical importance to every British citizen; and it is only by discussion and interchange of ideas, in the colonies as well as in the mother country, that we can ever hope for a proper solution to this, the greatest question of the day, in practical politics.

THE FEDERAL SOLUTION.

At the present time the most popular suggestion by way of remedy for our difficulties that has been put forward is the adoption of some form of Federation, and in one sense I think it will be allowed that if the Empire is to continue united, this is the direction which will be taken. At present all colonies, be they small or great, are in theory under the absolute power of the Crown, regulated by such constitutions as it has been pleased to grant, and the Crown in their case really means Parliament, or, practically, the Secretary of State for the Colonies; actually, the connection is kept up by sentiment, and no one really supposes that force would be ever employed to compel a colony to do anything which it really refused to do. Federation is a government by agreement between the several States who are a party to the compact, and it seems impossible to doubt that in the near future some such compact between the several communities of the British Empire will have to be substituted for the present loose and anomalous tie which holds them together. A Federation has been defined as being one State as regards its external, and many States as regards its internal relations; and, speaking generally, that is what we all wish the British Empire of the future to be; but when we come to examine the details of Federal Government, as they are known to us from existing examples, in the light of the facts with which we have to deal, we are bound to confess that any Federation which will succeed in uniting the British Empire

as it is now constituted must be of a very different kind from what is generally meant by the expression.

EXAMPLES OF FEDERATION.

The examples we have to study are not many. Switzerland, the United Provinces, Holland, and the United States—are those which occur to us at once. Switzerland and Holland will hardly serve our turn; they are both very small communities; they were compacted and forced together by the iron pressure of events. The history and the institutions of the former are indeed deeply interesting to every lover of free institutions, and to the latter the world owes a debt which should never be forgotten; but the conditions of their national existence are so wholly dissimilar, and in one case they have passed out of the Federal stage altogether, that we shall find little help in dealing with the world Empire of Great Britain from such comparisons. The United States of America indeed afford us many points both of instruction and of warning, to which I shall allude. Sweden and Norway, and Hungary and Austria, are also examples of a certain sort of Federation, or at any rate of States which are one in their external and utterly diverse in their internal relations. But neither of these unions has lasted long enough, nor, it should be added, do they promise such a stable national existence that we can take them for a model, although there are certain points which may I think be conveniently studied in connection with them. The Constitution of the United States will probably be accepted by the advocates of that form of Government, at any rate, as the example up to which we should work on laying down any rules for a Federation of the future, and I will try to discuss a few of the most obvious difficulties which meet us when we come to apply the lessons drawn from this source to the existing conditions of our own Empire.

HOW FEDERATION WOULD WORK.

We find at the outset, that the Federal Council, whatever it may be called, must be supreme. In other words, the arbitration of war and peace must be in its hands. This would, in our case, involve the effacement of the British Parliament, the "Mother of Parliaments," as it has rightly been called; the destruction of the traditions of a thousand years, and of all the memories which cluster round that institution, of which, with all its faults, a British citizen is most justly proud. I think that we all feel that hardly any advantage would enable the people of Great Britain to face a sacrifice like that. Yet, if we are to have a Federation in the sense in which it is generally received, there is no escaping the fact that the ancient Parliament of England would have to be degraded to the position of a State legislature. The alternative has been suggested of returning colonial members to the House of Commons; but if few in number they would be of no real value; and, if in proportion to population, they would, in the natural course of events, in a few years swamp the Parliament of the mother country. Besides, if colonial members are to sit and vote on questions affecting the taxation of Great Britain, the right would have to be allowed to the Parliament of Great Britain of taxing the colonies. A Federal Government in America, at least, means a Government in which the Federal Council makes laws which are binding on individuals throughout the whole Federation, and in which it imposes taxes on those individuals for Federal purposes. This would involve a considerable surrender of rights on the part of the colonies, which would probably be as distasteful to them as the assumption of taxing rights by the colonies over Great Britain would be to the people of that country. The very essence of a true Federal Government is the collection of Federal revenues from individuals by Federal officers, if necessary supported by Federal troops. It is the power of the Federal Government over individuals that is

the keystone of the United States Government, but an assertion of the same power in British colonies would be a matter of grave difficulty and inconvenience. The power of the Federal Council over trade and over all fiscal matters connected with trade is also a feature of the United States Constitution. If this were insisted on it would require a readjustment of the whole scheme of colonial taxation, which depends in almost every instance on large sums derived from dues on imports, either from the mother country or from other parts of the British dominions.

THE INDIA DIFFICULTY.

The possession and the responsibility for the Government of India is another matter to which, in the discussions which I have seen on this subject, I do not think sufficient attention has been given. In any form of Federation this would devolve on the Federal Council; and every member would have to contribute to the burden, which, under certain very possible circumstances, might become extremely heavy; while it would be very difficult to explain the corresponding material or moral advantages which would accrue to other members of the Federation from this Imperial possession—to Canada, or to Australia, for instance, who would still under any scheme of true Federal Government have to bear an equal share in the responsibility and expense arising from its government. I cannot call to mind any instance of a Federal democracy to one member of which was attached such a responsibility, and I cannot help thinking that the position of our Indian Empire will be in the future one of the gravest questions in any scheme of government on a Federal basis.

NATURE'S OBSTACLES.

The difficulties which I have glanced at are all, great though they may be, of a kind which can be overcome or avoided. There are others which seem to be obstacles imposed by nature itself. The different social conditions growing out of climatic relations, and ever tending to get stronger as the influence of climate and social surroundings continue to modify local types of character, will render it increasingly difficult to form any kind of union which shall be shaped to include communities separated by the diameter of the globe in one actual and living whole. At present Canada and Australia are united by bonds of sentiment and affection to Great Britain, but the national feeling has yet to be created which will make Australia and Canada feel towards each other that practical form of attachment which is the first requisite of a true national life. This feeling ought to precede a closer union. It will never be created by a mere paper Constitution. But I am afraid that you will think that I am raising unnecessary obstacles; that I am too prone to "see a lion in the path." Believe me that these are no imaginary difficulties which I have brought before you; and those who are in earnest in the matter, who talk of unity, and profess to believe in the possibility of a Federation of the Empire, must be prepared to face them, and must try and think out some possible solution.

A LEAGUE OF STATES.

There is indeed another form of Federation which avoids most of them; and that is a League of Confederate States in which the Central Government deals with the States of which the League is composed, and not with the individual inhabitants. This, as you are aware, is the form which the Government of the United States first assumed; and it is also the one under which for many hundred years the Swiss Confederation maintained that national life which is so wonderful and interesting. I am inclined to think, if I might venture on an opinion, that some form of Government of this kind is the one which the United British Empire will ultimately assume. Under this kind of Federal Government, the States are practically independent; but for external pur-

poses, for war and for peace, they form one State, whose affairs are managed by a council to which each State sends delegates—and for the support of whose decrees, quotas or contributions are voted, which are levied by the States themselves who are responsible for them. The difficulty in the case of the United States was that these quotas, both in men and money, were often unpaid, and the national existence was in consequence imperilled in its very infancy by the neglect or disobedience of the individual States. If this happened in the case of the United States at a period of national peril, when the passions of men were roused, when the national sentiment of loyalty would be at its highest, and when the national territory was occupied by a foreign foe, what—it may fairly be argued—could be expected under circumstances less exciting from a Confederation based on similar lines? It is difficult to find a reply; but I think that the breakdown of this scheme of the American Constitution was in no small measure owing to the fact that all the States, irrespective of their size and importance, had an equal voice as regards votes, a principle which seems to strike at the root of true representation; also the extreme misery of the States, and the nature of the war in which they were engaged, might be considered to afford some palliation for their neglect and lukewarmness.

HEGEMONY OF ENGLAND.

The plan might have a fairer chance of success if undertaken under the hegemony of a sovereign State enormously superior, not only to any individual member of the Confederation, but also to all the rest put together, as was the case with the United Provinces when Holland held this position; and if also the representation and the weight which each State was entitled to at the general council was proportioned in some degree to the population and resources. The difficulty would arise here, as it would under any form of union whatever, that the decision of matters of peace and war would be taken out of the hands of the Parliament of Great Britain; and this is the main thing which stands in the way of any scheme at all which may be put forward, because, when you come down to first principles, the power of peace and war—that is, the employment of force—is the basis of all Government, and must rest in the hands of the Supreme authority, whether it is a Parliament or a Federal Council, or whatever we choose to call it. So grave is this difficulty that one is almost tempted to believe that no union on the basis of Confederation is possible unless, in the face of some great national catastrophe, which should throw England back on her sons all over the world, and when the defence of the very cardinal principles of which the British Empire is founded would either create a true national feeling, which would sweep away all obstacles, and force on at all costs a true Commonwealth of British subjects, or shatter the nation into fragments never to be reunited again. Every one among us must pray that no such catastrophe will take place, for it would mean much misery and much loss, and it would set back the tide of civilisation all over the world; but short of this it seems to me that the only practical way to bring about that union which we desire is to set to work to remove by degrees some of the obstacles to which I have before alluded, and to labour to create a growth of national feeling that may take the place of that sentiment, which, admirable as it is, will scarcely stand the shock of practical difficulties. I will try to indicate some of the ways in which I think this object may be effected.

START WITH THE NAVY.

In the first place, I think that the navy ought to be made a national navy, and that the colonies ought to be asked to contribute to its maintenance. The British navy has long since ceased to be an instrument of aggression. It may fairly be

called the police of the world; and we may be pretty certain that it will never be employed except for the interests of the whole of the Empire. To the colonies the maintenance of the navy is peculiarly important, for their very existence depends on its efficiency and power. There is surely nothing extravagant in a proposal that in this respect they should take a fair share of the burdens of that Empire of which they form a part. Nor need the contribution impose any severe or inordinate burden on the colonies. Take our own case, for instance—for there is nothing like a practical application of any proposal which is otherwise likely to be made somewhat at random. Our European population is about in the proportion of 1 to 120 of the population of the United Kingdom, and if our quota to the support of the navy were on the basis of population, it would come to £100,000 per annum—a large sum, you will say, even to pay as the price of our national existence. How much less though than if we were to set up, as some people wildly propose on our own account, as an "African nation." True, it is a large sum; but if Great Britain were, in consideration of our taking upon us our share of this national duty, as she very well might do, for it would cost her nothing to guarantee a certain amount of our national debt, say £10,000,000, for instance, it would by increasing the value of the security, and enabling us to borrow at a lower rate, relieve us of an annual sum at least 50 per cent. in excess of our contribution, and the mother country and the colony would be bound together by a mutual obligation greatly to their common advantage. This is a suggestion—vague if you like; but I must confess that I like to see these things argued out on the commonplace basis of pounds, shillings and pence. It is no use having grand meetings and talking about attachment to the Empire, and desire for unity, unless we are prepared when it comes to the pinch, in vulgar parlance, to back our opinion; and until some attempt is made in this direction I for one shall look on the case as rather hopeless. It does not need much argument to convince anyone that to belong to a great and powerful Empire is cheap and advantageous; infinitely cheaper—to put things on the lowest ground, for instance,—than to be shnt out in the cold as a petty Republic, or to be tacked on to some tribute-exacting Power. But if we never make a beginning in putting them into practice, all these fine convictions will remain a dead letter, until it will be too late to begin to do so, I firmly believe that if this matter of the navy were really taken in hand at the present time, it might form the nucleus of that national feeling, and of those national institutions without which it will be hopeless to stay the policy of drift. The sum I have mentioned is large, and it will justly shock all practical men, but it is only the *pro ratâ* share of our contribution to one branch of Imperial expenditure, and it is well that those who draw up fancy pictures of Federal legislatures or of colonial members in the House of Commons should reflect that these privileges, and these advantages, will entail upon us a far greater amount of expenditure than a mere contribution to the navy will do. Looking to the alternative, I feel sure that you will agree with me in the abstract that scarcely any price is too high to pay for membership in the British Empire, and that it would not be difficult to prove in figures that the gain would be entirely on our side; but I am sure also that it will take some time to educate colonists up to a sense of this side of their duty; and I think that it will be well to begin by degrees, taking the navy as a starting point, for every year that the lesson is postponed it will become increasingly difficult.

A VOICE IN IMPERIAL AFFAIRS.

In another direction, also, I think that the time has come when a step forward might be taken at once with great advantage; and that is by giving the colonies a voice in matters relating to their

external relations. I do not say a control, for control means responsibility, and responsibility means contribution, though, as I have just said, the time for contribution to Imperial objects in a partial way is not very far off; but I think that even a purely consultative voice would be of value, and that it would lead to a further development of the national idea. In other words, I think that self-governing colonies should have a right of making themselves heard in London, by means of representatives, and that the Secretary of State should be bound to consult them on all matters affecting their interests. It would be of secondary importance to determine whether these colonial representatives should all be gathered together in common council. For my own part, I think that it would be a great advantage to the Empire if there were such common action even of a consultative kind; and that it could not fail to create that common national feeling between the scattered members of the Empire, the absence of which is one of the chief stumbling-blocks to any scheme of Federative union. But the great point in this proposal of a Colonial Council is the judicial change which it would make in the position of the self-governing colonies. They would deal with the Government of England first hand. Their policy, changeable if you like, but still the policy of the majority in their Parliaments, would make itself heard in Downing-street; and the policy of the British Government would be known to them. Sir Hercules Robinson, in a criticism which he has recently communicated to the *Pall Mall Gazette* on the scheme of a Colonial Council, has, with his admirable common-sense, at once grasped the fact—which has elsewhere been somewhat overlooked—of the revolution which such a council would create in colonial administration; and I think he has done great service in doing so. Sir Hercules Robinson thinks, perhaps not unnaturally, that the Secretary of State can, and does, get all the information he requires from his own department; and that any Council of Advice would be the fifth wheel of a wagon. This is the very gist of the whole matter. Those who advocate a Colonial Council contend that departmental advice is often over-riden or shelved, and that to departmental officers half information is often only given; and they believe that the time has come when the natural development of free institutions should bring the Secretary of State, who speaks in the name of the Crown, into immediate relations through their Governments with the Parliament of the colonies, who will have in the future to bear the brunt of his experiments.

BRINGING THE COLONIES TOGETHER.

Another criticism which is often made upon this proposal, and which was indeed made only a few weeks ago here in Cape Town, is the absence of special knowledge among the different members who would compose the proposed Council. What, say the objectors on this ground, can an Australian or a New Zealander know about South African matters? what interest can they feel in them? Surely, however, it will not be difficult to find many matters upon which all colonies have a common interest, and upon which it is very desirable that some common national feeling should be formed. The great question of Imperial defence, for instance, to say nothing of trade relations with foreign countries, are points which will at once suggest themselves as those on which the united advice and opinion of the colonies might with advantage be taken direct by the Secretary of State. In merely local matters, I would say that it is chiefly desirable that the opinion of those who are locally responsible for the management of affairs should be directly communicated to the Secretary of State, and that this principle holds good, even if we may be able to bring forward many points upon which we individually might differ from the opinion

which the local government would advance, and that, in the discussion of such local matters, a council of colonial representatives would at least have as much special information and knowledge, and be able to form as good an opinion, as the present irresponsible heads of departments, in whose hands our destiny is placed. The great point, however, is that this Colonial Council would be an advance in the direction in which we all profess to be anxious to travel. All the objections and all the difficulties which are raised in discussing its constitution apply with tenfold force to any more elaborate scheme of a Federal Council which is to embrace, as Mr. Baden-Powell pleaded the other day, not only counsel, but control and contribution. Above all, it would be a means of creating that national feeling between the different communities of the British Empire which is an indispensable preliminary to any larger scheme, having for its aim the continuance and the expansion of the national bond.

A ROYAL COMMISSION.

One other step which I think would be of great practical use in promoting the development of the principle of unity, and which might with great advantage be taken at once, would be the appointment of a Royal Commission to inquire and report on the whole question of the relations of Great Britain and her dependencies, and the inclusion in such commission of representatives to be appointed by the Parliaments or by the Governments of the self-governing colonies. Anyone who has devoted any practical study to this great question, anyone who has advanced one stage beyond the utterance of mere platform sentimental clap-trap, must be struck with the vast difficulties which meet one at every turn, and no less by the lack of information from practical guidance in arriving at the beginning of any decision on the matter. People talk glibly of Federation, and of representation, who would be shocked at the very mention of that contribution and taxation which are their inseparable concomitants. Others, again, object to the very moderate and tentative step involved in the proposal for a Council of Advice, who profess to be horrified at the only alternative which must be the result if no attempt is made to provide for the daily altering and expanding conditions of a number of free communities. Then, too, there is the preponderating class of the "let well alone," who require to have brought home to them the fact that there are times and occasions when even the most practical man must admit that it would be wise and prudent to provide for contingencies before the enemy is at the gates, and the fatal words "too late" must be written once again over our policy. If ever there was a case for "more light" it is this matter of national unity, at least, in the practical measures for bringing it about. I am glad to see from some recent remarks made by him, that the Prince of Wales, who bids fair to become as useful a man to the State as his father was before him, has taken up this question. He could have no nobler task, nor could there be one in which, at any rate in the initial stages, his constitutional functions could be more legitimately exercised than in the collection of information and in the stimulation of an earnest desire to give a practical shape to noble aspirations. A Royal Commission of the kind I have sketched would throw that light on the whole question which is so much needed. It would be, indeed, a sort of informal National Convention like those to which we owe the most wonderful and most practical political achievement that the world has perhaps ever seen—the Federal Constitution of the United States of America. As an indispensable preliminary to any practical action, a commission is the first step—whether it will be taken depends on whether there is any real meaning in all this agitation about national union, or whether it is destined to evaporate in talk alone.

GENERALITIES VERSUS DETAILS.

I have now tried to lay before you—and I fear I have only imperfectly succeeded—this great question of the future of our nation, and the difficulties which surround it, and I have ventured, perhaps unwisely, to suggest certain steps which might be taken towards their solution. I am quite aware that as long as anyone confines himself to generalities it is possible to secure a tolerable amount of agreement, or even enthusiasm among his audience; but when he dares to come to details a thousand critics are sure to find out that he is ignorant and unpractical. Again I say that the question of our national future is not one that can be dealt with by platform platitudes, he they never so eloquent. It is, above all others, one which requires to be dealt with in detail; and I therefore think that I need scarcely apologise for having brought forward, even in the crude way which I have done this evening, some of the more practical aspects of the case.

THE TRUE NATIONAL IDEAL.

I have not touched the great material side of the question. I have not tried to show you by a long array of figures the size, the wealth, and the value of the trade of that mighty Empire of which we form a part, nor to try and convince you, by an appeal to your pockets or your pride, that a united Empire is a thing which will pay best. I know that these arguments are familiar to you all. They are embodied in many aphorisms, such as "Trade follows the flag" and all the rest, and they may be studied in a hundred hooks. It is good sometimes to remember that national life is something more than a mere question of the warehouse and the shop. The advantages conferred by citizenship in the British Empire, and which will be secured by union and by strengthening the ties of national life, are not wholly material; they are not even chiefly material. An eloquent writer, referring to the only other Empire which the world has seen that can bear comparison to our own, and answering the question why the nations round them felt "that the Romans were the lords of the human race," has justly observed:—"It was not because they covered the face of the earth with famous and enduring cities, because their engineers excavated harbours, drained marshes, and brought the waters of the hills along miles of stupendous aqueducts; because they bound together their Empire with a network of roads and postal services; because they were the masters of organised and scientific war; because they were great colonial administrators, subduing the earth to subdue its rudeness, and to plant in it the arts of peace; but because, in spite of the matchless perfidy and match-

less cruelty which contradicted their own ideals, and seem to silence us when we talk of Roman virtue, it is yet true that deep in the minds of the most faithless, the most selfish, the most worthless, was the knowledge that justice and public spirit were things to which a Roman, by the nobility of his birth, was obliged; because the traditional accepted popular morality of Rome placed among its first articles, however they were violated in practice, that fortitude, honesty, devotion, energy in service were essential things in a society of men, because Romans recognised a serious use of life in doing, and doing for the common weal, not merely in learning, or acquiring or enjoying for themselves alone." So, too, would we fain believe, that it is not her boundless wealth, nor the surpassing luxury of her capital, nor her mighty Empire which girdles the globe, nor her fleets which cover every sea, which make Great Britain the first among the nations of the earth, and gives a glory to her name, but because in spite of all her faults, and all her manifold mistakes, she sets before her citizens the lofty ideal of justice tempered with mercy, of freedom, not as a selfish possession to be enjoyed by a privileged few, but as a boon to be handed on to all with whom she is brought in contact; and of duty to the State for duty's sake and not for material reward. This—is is the true greatness of our nation, and we ought to feel that, in labouring to build up a United Empire, we are securing for those that come after us the heritage of this mighty renown (loud cheers).

The Rev. J. M. Russell said:—On behalf of the Scottish Church Literary Society, I beg to tender you, Mr. Merriman, our hearty thanks for the able and masterly lecture delivered by you this evening. We feel that you have conferred a great kindness upon us in delivering this lecture, and the audience will unite with me in thanking you for the hearty lecture given. You have contributed towards making us understand this very important subject more fully than before. I have much pleasure in proposing a hearty vote of thanks (applause).

The Chairman:—I must put it to the meeting to say whether they do not think that a lecture like this raises in their minds a greater interest and desire to see British supremacy extended throughout the world. I have much pleasure in now conveying to you, Mr. Merriman, the hearty thanks of the audience (cheers).

Mr. Merriman:—I am very much obliged for the expressions of thanks. It is hard to put a subject like the one I have lectured on in a popular form. I shall be amply repaid if those amongst the audience will go home and study it amongst themselves.





